

Thomas Jefferson to Robert Smith, September 18, 1807, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY J. MSS. (ROBERT SMITH.)

Monticello, Sept. 18, 1807.

Dear Sir, —On my return yesterday I found yours of the 10th, and now re-enclose you Com Rodgers' letter. You remember that the orders to Decatur were to leave the British ships unmolested so long as they laid quiet in the Bay; but if they should attempt to enter Eliz river to attack them with all his force. The spirit of these orders should, I think, be applied to New York. So long as the British vessels merely enter the Hook, or remain quiet there, I would not precipitate hostilities. I do not sufficiently know the geography of the harbor to draw the line which they should not pass. Perhaps the narrows, perhaps some other place which yourself or Commodore Rogers can fix with the aid of the advice he can get in N York. But a line should be drawn which if they attempt to pass, he should attack them with all his force. Perhaps he would do well to have his boats ordinarily a little without the line to let them see they are not to approach it; but whether he can lay there in safety, *ordinarily*, he must judge. But if the British vessels continue at the Hook, great attention should be paid to prevent their receiving supplies or their landing, or having any intercourse with the shore or other vessels. I left Mr. Nicholas's yesterday morning: he is indisposed with his annual influenza. Mrs. Nicholas is well. I shall be at Washington the 3d proximo. Affectionate salutations.